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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIAN MINISTER FOR KOSOVO ESCORTED TO BORDER BY KOSOVO AND EULEX POLICE

REF: EMAILS BURTON-PFEUFFER JAN 12, 2010

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: After ignoring procedures for official visits to Kosovo, Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanovic and his party were stopped and expelled from Kosovo by Kosovo Police on January 13. Bogdanovic and his party were traveling to Strpce for political purposes. The stop went smoothly and no fallout in Strpce is expected. EULEX police observed the entire operation. In a conversation with us, Bogdanovic's deputy threatened an end to the GOS's "cooperation" on Kosovo as a consequence of the expulsion. Bogdanovic was quick to imply in the press that his expulsion was an example of the GOK's denial of the basic human right of freedom of movement to Kosovo Serbs. In fact, it was evidence only that GOS officials cannot blatantly disregard the rules governing official visits to Kosovo without consequence. END SUMMARY

KOSOVO POLICE ENDS MINISTER'S UNAUTHORIZED TRIP

¶12. (SBU) Kosovo Police (KP) stopped Serbian Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanovic, his deputy Dragan Petkovic, and their 25-person entourage just outside the village of Jazinice, Strpce Municipality, at 1148 on January 13. The KP, which included regular and special units, told the Minister he had to leave Kosovo because he failed to observe procedures for official visits. (Note: Bogdanovic was traveling to Strpce to meet with representatives of illegal, parallel structures and did not request permission from the GOK for the trip. End Note) Bogdanovic asked to be escorted to Mitrovica, but the KP escorted him to the Merdare border crossing with Serbia. At one point, the KP searched the vehicles in Bogdanovic's six-car convoy. EULEX Police monitored the KP throughout, and Bogdanovic and his party cooperated. He left Kosovo without incident at approximately 1430, pausing at the border to make statement to the press. Bogdanovic asserted the episode demonstrated that Serbs lacked the right to move freely in Kosovo.

KOSOVO HAD SOUGHT, RECEIVED EU SUPPORT FOR STOP

¶3. (SBU) Bogdanovic had travelled to Strpce from Mitrovica in northern Kosovo in a private car, ignoring explicit advice from EUSR and EULEX not to ignore procedures for requesting permission to travel to Kosovo and to refrain from making the trip without the proper authority (Ref). Prime Minister Hashim Thaci had urged ICR/EUSR Pieter Feith to stop Bogdanovic's visit because of its clear political purpose and Bogdanovic's failure to seek and receive approval for it. Thaci also sought Feith's support for KP action to stop Bogdanovic. Brussels subsequently approved EULEX monitoring of the KP's effort to stop Bogdanovic.

LEGITIMATE MAYOR UNFAZED BY INCIDENT

¶4. (SBU) Strpce's new mayor, the Independent Liberal Party's (SLS) Bratislav Nikolic, who was inaugurated on January 12, told us Bogdanovic had managed to visit a GOS-funded school in Strpce's Sevce village, before he was stopped by KP. According to Nikolic, villagers at the school had complained about Bogdanovic's lack of attention to Strpce. Nikolic said the municipal government did not expect any negative fallout within the community due to Bogdanovic's expulsion. Assistant Minister Petkovic called us twice from the road, very agitated, and stated the GOS would "re-think its cooperation" on Kosovo following the stop. He also complained about the KP's search of their vehicles.

COMMENT: VISITS ARE ALL ABOUT STATUS AND SPIN

¶5. (SBU) Today's attempt by Minister Bogdanovic to make what was clearly a political visit to Kosovo without permission, and his statements at its conclusion, suggest that the visit was intended

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from the beginning to be a political stunt. Bogdanovic's contention that his treatment demonstrates Kosovo Serbs' lack freedom of movement is wrong on its face. The KP action was nothing more than a statement about the consequences to Serbian government officials of ignoring established procedures for arranging official visits to Kosovo. Bogdanovic's statements on freedom of movement mirror those of President Tadic, delivered yesterday on Zvecan's TV "Most." They likely hint at arguments Serbia intends to make before the Security Council when it next debates Kosovo January 22, where it would not surprise us if representatives from Belgrade and other capitals tried to make political hay out of today's events.

DELL